



United States Department of the Interior

MINERALS MANAGEMENT SERVICE
Washington, DC 20240



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Dear Gulf of Mexico Region Employees,

The Secretary and I were very pleased to have had a chance to visit briefly with you last Monday. Our recognition of the professionalism and huge efforts made by the COOP team and their colleagues was sincere and profound.

The next day we were privileged to have an hour fly-over the whole city of New Orleans. Parts of it, as you know, are terribly devastated. Although we saw many pumps working and the water level was going down, it will be a while before those neighborhoods are re-built. Other parts did not look too bad and yet there were a lot of blown over trees and roofless houses. Our hearts bled for the Crescent City.

Listening to you last Monday, I have no doubt that New Orleans will be re-built, as I am sure most natives and residents of New Orleans feel the way you do.

The New Orleans building is being repaired right now but there was more damage than first thought. No one knows exactly how long it will take to fix. We will renegotiate our lease in New Orleans and commit to ten years. **I assure you, you are going back to New Orleans.**

My job and that of the senior management team of MMS is to make sure that we provide a safe and clean environment in which to work and that we get our regulatory mission fulfilled, even under terrible circumstances. And these are terrible circumstances.

Managing a staff of some 500 people splintered and scattered over several states would be very difficult. We need to keep the group close together. Some small group might be detailed somewhere else but the majority must stick together in an acceptable place until our building is rebuilt.

If the New Orleans District Office building can be fixed quickly and become almost immediately functional, then those employees can go back in it, along with a number of others whose jobs demand that they be there in order to function.

There might be a small group that may need to be in Herndon, but basically the vast majority of the Region's employees will be **temporarily** in Houston until they can move back to our building in New Orleans, or to a suitable location nearby.

I have already formally requested an extension of 30 days of administrative leave for those that we cannot deploy to an office right away. I hope to receive a positive answer early this week. When that period expires, we need to be sure everyone has a place to

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report to work. We have signed a lease for some office space in Houston and are looking for additional space. Regardless of the length of the leases we have to sign in Houston, we will vacate the premises as soon as the New Orleans building is ready to receive you.

I fully realize that even the temporary relocation to Houston creates personal hardships, some work-related inefficiencies, and higher costs to the government. However, in the absence of suitable alternatives for our employees to get back to work at Elmwood in a reasonable period of time, Houston offers the best solution available.

I have asked Tom Readinger and Chris Oynes to be very flexible in granting time off to folks who need to go for a few days at a time in New Orleans to take care of personal business.

I know this is a difficult time for everyone. I wish I could turn the clock back and divert a hurricane from your beloved city and state but that is impossible, so I must make the painful decisions that allow us to continue to perform the jobs the Nation expects of us.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your dedication,

John Butler